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ABSTRACT

A study conducted in Illinois determined how or if decision-makers actually used the results of a community problems needs assessment survey ("Illinois: Today and Tomorrow") of 15,000 persons in the state. Data for the use study were collected from sixty in-depth personal interviews with randomly selected cooperative extension advisors and administrators, state legislators and legislative research staff members, and state agency managers. Forty of the respondents used the results of the needs assessment, either directly or as background information, on issues of concern to them. Results show that the decision makers were most likely to use such sociological research when (1) the research information is perceived as the best data available: (2) the information confirms an already-held position: and (3) the research information fits with job-related informational needs. The results also suggest that timing, dissemination techniques, initial involvement in planning for the study, and explanation of the study results are factors that affect use of information about public opinion. (Author/KC)

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# PUBLIC DECISION MAKERS AND RESEARCH: THE INFLUENCE OF COMMUNITY PROBLEM STUDIES UPON LEGISLATORS, STATE OFFICE AND COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE STAFF

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# PUBLIC DECISION MAKERS AND RESEARCH: THE INFLUENCE OF COMMUNITY PROBLEM STUDIES UPON LEGISLATORS, STATE OFFICE AND COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE STAFF

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(abstract)

Title IV rural development funds have been channeled to rural sociologists in numerous states, notably Illinois, Pennsylvania, Kentucky, Florida and Washington for the purpose of studying community problems and other policy issues facing state and local governments. The results from these statewide surveys have provided a picture of how the general adult population ranks the major problems facing their states. Typically, the issues of housing, government-citizen relations and local job opportunities have emerged as important concerns. In addition, such areas as tax increases, program allocations, energy and the environment, land use, and consumer issues have been identified.

The intent of these investigations has been to provide public decision-makers with information they need to make informed decisions about new programs and the modifications of old ones in their states. To learn the extent to which the Illinois study met that goal, investigators from the University of Illinois included in their study a follow-up assessment to evaluate the impact of survey information upon public decision-makers. More specifically, they wanted to know in what ways, if any, did the information influence their decision-making process.

Data for this paper were collected from 60 in-depth personal interviews randomly selected to include Cooperative Extension area and county advisers and administrators, state legislators and legislative research staff members, and state agency persons in management positions. Interview topics included respondent interpretations of public opinion information, utilization of public opinion data in policy decision and in day-to-day operations, dissemination processes, and respondents' perceptions of the relevance of the Illinois: Today and Tomorrow information to their work situations.

The results of the follow-up study suggest that sociological research is used by public decision-makers when: (1) the research information is perceived as the best data available; (2) the information confirms an already held position; and (3) the research information fits with job related informational needs. The results also suggest that timing, dissemination techniques, and intial involvement in planning for the study are factors which affect utilization of information on public opinion.

# PUBLIC DECISION MAKERS AND RESEARCH: THE INFLUENCE OF COMMUNITY PROBLEM STUDIES UPON LEGISLATORS, STATE OFFICE AND COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE STAFF

Poll taking has been used by sociologists as a technique to reflect societal attitudes and perceptions since the '30's. However, an interest in the use of the results gathered from these polls is a more current phenomenon and one that has been limited to politically sensitive issues such as the Equal Rights Amendment, the employment status of Black Americans, and environmental degradation. On these issues, public opinion has been sought and used to affect changes within the society.

Rural sociologists, during the decade of the '70's, correctly foresaw that input from the general public was needed by a variety of state and local decision-makers who must deal with planning issues such as health, education, taxes, roads, and sewage, among others. The result has been community problem identification based on "needs assessment studes" which, to date, have been completed in Washington, Florida, Michigan, Indiana, Pennsylvania, North Carolina, Kentucky, Arizona, and Illinois. Based on sample sizes that run to 25,000, these assessments provide state and county decision-makers with accurate information about what people see as problems and concerns on a state, county, and community level.

The data gathering technique developed for these needs assessment studies was modified, tested, and continually improved by a collection of rural sociologists. Their technique included use of a mail questionnaire with follow-up replacements and reminders both by mail and phone (Dillman et al., 1974; Dillman, 1977; Warner, Hoffman and Burdge, 1944).

Response to this initiative -- gathering public input on social problems -- has been nothing short of phenomenal. The files of the principal investigators are filled with newspaper and television citations, requests for publications and letters of appreciation (Burdge and Warner, 1977).

The purpose of this paper is to redress that imbalance by reporting how state

agency personnel, legislators and Cooperative Extension personnel in one state actually used the needs assessment, the information on community problems developed from survey research, in decision-making and program development.

## THE ILLINOIS: TODAY AND TOMORROW STUDY (I:TT)

### Background

The ILLINOIS: Today and Tomorrow study (I:TT) began in late summer 1977 (Burdge et al., 1978). To identify the major issues facing the state, the research team met with representatives of state agencies, legislative staffs, regional-planning organizations, the Cooperative Extension Service, the Chicago Department of Planning, and interest groups such as the Illinois Chamber of Commerce, the League of Women Voters, and the Illinois Farm Bureau. Persons contacted were given a preliminary list of issues including questions on energy. Each was asked to circulate the list within his/her organization for further staff comment. From these inputs (about 100 representatives of the above organizations and agencies took part), the research team drafted a questionnaire that was mailed to a pre-test sample of the general population selected from Peoria, Chicago, and rural Champaign County. In addition, telephone and personal interviews were conducted with a selected sample from the Champaign-Urbana area. Based on the above procedures, a 12-page printed mail questionnaire was developed.

From the list of licensed drivers, a statewide sample of 15,000 persons was selected to represent all adults in Illinois. The sample size was chosen to ensure the return of approximately 8,000 usable questionnaires (about one questionnaire for every 1,000 adults in the state). The actual return was one questionnaire for every 914 adults. The sample was proportioned by county and by sex and age (those 18 to 64 years of age and those 65 and older). The contributions to the sample from each county were proportioned to that county's share of the state population. In addition to the 15,000 people chosen for the statewide sample, another 2,500

people were selected for data analysis on a county and regional basis. A total of 9,900 usable responses was received for a response rate of 68.8 percent. The representative statewide sample included 8,268 usable questionnaires. Comparisons with the 1970 Census and 1975 population estimates show that the sample adequately reflects the Illinois adult population in relation fo sex, age, race, and marital status (see Burdge, et. al., 1978).

Publication and Dissemination of Research

Major findings from the study were published in a 16-page newspaper tabloid and in soft cover bulletins detailing such topics as tax issues and new tax programs, energy use, consumer complaints and issues, and urban and regional land use planning. Also included were an ordering of community problems for each region in the state and respondent sentiment on such issues as the Equal Rights Amendment and the expansion of nuclear power.

Dissemination of the findings was handled by mass mailing of the tabloid to all legislators/legislative staffs, state agencies, university faculty, Cooperative Extension personnel, local elected officials, planning agencies, private business, lobbying organizations, and respondents who requested a copy by placing their names on the back of the survey questionnaire's return envelope. A total of 30,000 tabloids were mailed. In addition, workshops on interpretation and use of the findings were conducted for state agencies, Cooperative Extension administrators and advisors (county agents), planning organizations and interested citizen groups. In-depth interviews were held with both the print and electronic media on selected topical areas of the findings. Finally, detailed analyses of topical issues have been prepared at the request of twelve state agencies.

# IMPACT STUDY

## Development

While most research ends with the first report, this research continued by assessing impact in terms of if, and to what extent, public decision-makers and planners utilized the I:TT findings. By impact is meant the actual and perceived program and decision changes resulting from the I:TT study as verbalized by decision-makers and planners.

To focus the study of impact, the following research question was posed:

> What is the relationship between work related problems faced by Cooperative Extension personnel, state agency planners, and legislator/legislative staff (all examples of decision-makers-planners) and the use of the needs assessment/community problems survey data (I:TT study findings)?

Job related informational needs were chosen as variables because the I:TT staff deliberately keyed the items on the questionnaire to the informational needs of the decision-makers contacted during the development of the I:TT questionnaire. Their informational needs were framed into questions and the responses to the questions were analyzed.

## Selection of Respondents

Data to assess impact were collected by means of 60 in-depth personal interviews that included 21 Cooperative Extension administrators and advisors (county agents), 19 state agency supervisors and assistants (from transportation, public aid, etc.), and 16 legislators and legislative staff. Twenty-four of those selected for interview had been initially involved in development of the I:TT questionnaire. The other 36 were randomly chosen from lists of persons that had requested the study findings or additional information after publication of the tabloid in May, 1978. Inclusion of both perspectives, initial involvement and demonstrated interest in the study findings, assumes the respondents to be in a classical sociological position (present and involved) to assess impact (Becker, 1961).

In addition, four respondents were interviewed because of their interest in the findings from the I:TT study. Two of the respondents were associated with two major "futures" planning efforts in the state. The third respondent represented one of the state's regional health associations while the fourth worked for a lobbying organization. The small size of this "special interest" group precludes comparison. Therefore, while all tables will report statistical findings of the special interest group, the discussion will focus entirely on the three major groups. Thus, included in the assessment of impact were those who were initially involved or who expressed interest in the I:TT study findings.

Development of the Interview Guide and Analysis of Data

An elite and specialized interview guide was developed to allow respondents to define their relationship to the I:TT study, to structure the accounts of involvement, and to enable the interviewer to record their perceptions of what portions of the findings were relevent to their work situations (Dexter, 1970).

The interview guide included questions concerning utilization, influence and process factors surrounding utilization (or lack of it), respondent's perceptions of needs assessment/community problem data, and their job related informational needs.

The data were analyzed inductively by using the modified grounded theory approach (Dubin, 1969). In using this approach the researcher starts with an ad hoc hypothesis and tests it empirically. The questions developed for the interview guide reflect those hypotheses. One example can be found in the question:

> Once the study was completed, were you told by the Illinois:Today and Tommorow staff how the study results might be used?

The ad hoc hypothesis that forms the basis for asking this question is that those respondents who were shown how to use the I:TT study findings were more likely to use them than were respondents who were not shown how to use the findings.

To examine responses to each question, a content and thematic analysis was

undertaken (Merton, 1965). This allowed for recurrent themes in the data to become identifiable. In addition, influence, process and outcome variables were identified (Farmer and Knox, 1977). An influence variable is one that surfaced as a partial cause for utilizing or not utilizing the I:TT study findings. A process variable identifies the activities involved in using the study findings while an outcome variable is an actual example of utilization. Analysis was restricted to cross tabulations as sample sizes in many cells were very small. The sample was not intended to represent any larger population.

## FINDINGS

Out of a total of 60 respondents, 40 used the I:TT study findings in an instrumental or conceptual manner. Instrumental refers to a direct, identifiable action that was taken at least in part as a result of the I:TT study findings (Berg, et al., 1978; Rich, 1975) The development of the railroad crossing safety program in the town of Effingham in central Illinois, the passage of legislation requiring changes in the rehabilitation of intoxicated drivers are examples of instrumental utilization. Conceptual refers to usage that is informational or provides a background perspective on issues of concern to the respondent (Berg, et al., 1978). Examples of conceptual utilization include the process of disseminating the I:TT findings, discussing and/or presenting the findings to other persons, and using the findings to help to develop new programs.

Another form of utilization, symbolic, was also identified (Knorr, 1977). Symbolic usage includes the intention of respondents to use the study findings in the future. In addition to the 40 respondents previously mentioned, seven respondents stated future intentions of using the findings. The symbolic category is not included in the discussion of utilization as future intent could not here be documented. Thirteen of those interviewed did not use the findings either instrumentally, conceptually, or symbolically but were aware of the study.

Respondent's Position and Utilization of Findings

In terms of instrumental usage, Cooperative Extension administrators and advisors tended to use the findings for developing and carrying out programs. State office supervisors and assistants used the I:TT study findings to develop reports which demonstrated or justified planning relative to their agencies. Legislators and legislative staff persons used the findings to help change legislation and create media support for their favored legislation. (See Table 1, page 8).

The conceptual use of findings took different forms. Extension administrators tended to use the findings as part of a process for developing programs while Extension advisors located in the counties were more likely to play a facilitator role by passing the findings on to people in their communities and making public presentations. State office supervisors and assistants were also likely to pass on the findings to others and, to a lesser extent, to use the findings for developing programs. Legislators and legislative staff persons tended to use the findings in discussions with other office people and as a reference source. (See Table 2, page 9).

Job Related Informational Needs and the I:TT Findings

The I:TT study was seen by its researchers as a first step in decision-making. They were providing to decision-makers high quality research information on perceptions of community problems from a statewide sample. Extension staff required identification of community problems on a regional and county basis. Legislators required both specific information on the perceived problems facing their districts and more general information on statewide problems. State office personnel required problem identification information for the development of comprehensive agency plans based on their administrative areas.

Even though needs differed, respondents' perception of the fit between the I:TT study and their job related information needs was generally positive with the exception of state office supervisors and legislative staff. Out of 12 state supervisors, 5 stated that the I:TT study did not fit their job related needs. Among the

TABLE 1

TYPES OF INSTRUMENTAL UTILIZATION OF THE I:TT STUDY FINDINGS ACCORDING TO *POSITION

| Types of Instrumental Utilization | Position: Coop Ext Admin (N=6) | Coop Ext Advisor (N=15) | State Office Super (N=12) | State Office Ass't (N=7) | Legislator (N=9) | Legis Staff (N=7) | Special Interest Group (N=4) | Total (60) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Program Development | 3 | 6 | - | - | - | - | 1 | 10 |
| Preparation of Agency Reports | 1 | 1 | 3 | 2 | - | - | 3 | 10 |
| Increase Resources | 2 | 1 | - | - | 1 | - | 1 | 5 |
| Change Law | - | 1 | 1 | - | - | 1 | - | 3 |
| Teaching Tool | 1 | 1 | 1 | - | - | - | - | 3 |
| Create News Reports | - | - | 1 | - | 1 | - | 1 | 3 |
| Identify Resources | - | - | 1 | 1 | - | - | - | 2 |
| Obtain Funding | - | 1 | 1 | - | - | - | - | 2 |
| Use I:TT Data in Place of Own Study | - | - | - | 1 | - | - | 1 | 2 |
| Total: | 4 | 9 | 6 | 4 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 40 |

Total: Instances of Instrumental Utilization = 40

Total: # of Respondents Utilizing Data Instrumentally = 28

*Respondents were permitted more than one response.

TABLE 2

TYPES OF CONCEPTUAL UTILIZATION OF THE I:TT STUDY FINDINGS
ACCORDING TO *POSITION

| Types of Conceptual Utilization | Position: Coop Ext Admin (N=6) | Coop Ext Advisor (N=15) | State Office Super (N=12) | State Office Ass't (N=7) | Legislator (N=9) | Legis Staff (N=7) | Special Interest Group (N=4) | Total (60) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Dissemination | 1 | 11 | 3 | 2 | - | - | 1 | 18 |
| Delivered Presentation | 2 | 9 | 1 | - | 1 | - | 1 | 14 |
| In Process of Developing Program | 4 | 6 | 2 | 1 | - | - | - | 13 |
| To Gain Entrance Into Other Organizations | 2 | 1 | - | 2 | 1 | - | 2 | 8 |
| Discussion | 1 | 1 | - | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 7 |
| Reference | 1 | 1 | 1 | - | 1 | 1 | - | 4 |
| Total: | 6 | 15 | 7 | 4 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 64 |

Total: Instances of Conceptual Utilization = 64

Total: # of Respondents Utilizing Data Conceptually = 39

*Respondents were permitted more than one response.

legislative staff, 4 respondents stated either "no", "don't know", or that the fit was "minimal". The majority, if not all, of the Cooperative Extension administrators, advisors, state office assistants and legislators stated that the I:TT study findings addressed their job related needs. (See Table 3, page 11).

Positive Influence Factors

In the early portion of the interview, all respondents who cited some example of utilization were asked:

> What factors encouraged you to use the information from the I:TT study?

The positive influence factors most often cited were:

(1) the study had credence;

(2) the study confirmed already held beliefs.

These factors were cited most often by Cooperative Extension personnel and state office supervisors who also cited the study's value. State office assistants and legislators also cited the two main positive factors while legislative staff persons cited the credence and value factors. (See Table 4, page 12). The following are quotes from respondents:

> ...interest group polling is suspect but I:TT was a poll on a wide range of subjects by a group having no pre-set goals.
>
> The study supported a position we had already taken and added credibility.
>
> It supported my own view and I felt it was an unbiased study that had respondents state-wide.
>
> ...it supported things we thought before.

Negative Influence Factors

Respondents were asked:

> What factors discouraged you from using the I:TT study information?

Most often cited as factors limiting utilization were:

(1) study did not fit job related needs;

TABLE 3

RESPONDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE FIT BETWEEN THEIR JOB RELATED INFORMATIONAL NEEDS AND THE I:TT STUDY FINDINGS

| Respondent Position | Fit Between I:TT Study and Job Related Needs | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Yes | No | Minimal | Don't Know | Total |
| Coop Ext Admin | 6 | - | - | - | 6 |
| Coop Ext Advis | 11 | 2 | 2 | - | 15 |
| State Office Super | 7 | 5 | - | - | 12 |
| State Office Ass't | 5 | 1 | - | 1 | 7 |
| Legis-lator | 6 | 1 | - | 2 | 9 |
| Legis Staff | 3 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 7 |
| Special Interest Group | 4 | - | - | - | 4 |
| Total: | 42 | 10 | 4 | 4 | 60 |

TABLE 4

POSITIVE INFLUENCE FACTORS CITED BY *RESPONDENTS

| Positive Influence Factors | Position: Coop Ext Admin (N=6) | Coop Ext Advisor (N=15) | State Office Super (N=12) | State Office Ass't (N=7) | Legislator (N=9) | Legis Staff (N=7) | Special Interest Group (N=4) | Total (60) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Study Had Credence | 5 | 6 | 5 | 3 | 5 | 3 | 2 | 29 |
| Study Confirmed Already Held Beliefs | 2 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 1 | 4 | 25 |
| Study Provided Information | 2 | 6 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 13 |
| Study Was Valuable | 1 | 1 | 5 | 2 | - | 2 | 1 | 12 |
| Tabloid's Format Was Good | 1 | 2 | 3 | - | 2 | 1 | 1 | 10 |
| Respondent Predisposed to Using Study Data | 1 | 2 | 4 | - | 1 | - | 1 | 9 |
| Timing of Study Was Good | - | 2 | 1 | 2 | - | 1 | - | 6 |
| Respondents No Answering: | (1) | (1) | (2) | (1) | (3) | (3) | - | (11) |

Total: Number of Instances of Positive Cites = 104

Total: Number of Respondents Citing Positive Factors = 49

*Respondents were permitted to have multiple answers

(2) the findings were too general;

(3) the study's topical categories were inadequate, such as the combining of business with industry.

State office supervisors most often complained that the timing of the study was poor relative to agency needs and that these respondents were not involved in the initial planning. Poor timing generally referred to changes happening within the agency external to the I:TT study or budget preparation that preoccupied the agency. Legislative staff persons also cited timing of the study as poor and complained that the study findings did not fit their job related informational needs and were too general. Cooperative Extension administrators cited two main problems: (1) the I:TT staff's presentation of the findings was inadequate; (2) their staffs lacked the expertise to facilitate the utilization of community problem information. Extension advisors also cited their own lack of expertise in dealing with community problems as a factor hampering utilization. State office assistants were largely concerned with the generality of the findings, while legislators focussed on the three major negative factors and the unsuitability of the tabloid format as a vehicle for disseminating community problem information. Legislators also complained that the study did not provide answers to specific questions they needed for voting. (See Table 5, page 14).

Thus, it appears that for state office supervisors, problems with the fit between the I:TT study findings and their job related needs rested in part with the timing of the I:TT study and their perceived lack of involvement in the planning stages of the study (Table 5). State office supervisors' perception of their initial involvement with the I:TT study is curious. Out of 12 state office supervisors who were interviewed, 10 had been initially involved in the planning stages (Table 6). The psychology of forgetfulness is not in the purview of this paper. However, it can be said that for whatever reasons, several of the state office supervisors did not remember their involvement in the planning stages, which is documented. Whether the forgetfulness was due to peculiarities of the individual

TABLE 5

NEGATIVE INFLUENCE FACTORS CITED BY *RESPONDENTS

| Negative Influence Factors | Coop Ext Admin (N=6) | Coop Ext Advis (N=15) | State Office Super (N=12) | State Office Ass't (N=7) | Legis lator (N=9) | Legis Staff (N=7) | Special Interest Group (N=4) | Total (60) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Study Did Not Fit Job Needs | - | 2 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 10 |
| Findings Too General | - | 1 | 3 | 3 | 1 | 2 | - | 10 |
| Did Not Like Study's Topical Categories | - | 2 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 9 |
| Not Told How to Use Findings | - | 3 | 2 | 1 | 1 | - | 1 | 8 |
| Study's Timing Poor for Agency Needs | 1 | 1 | 4 | - | - | 2 | - | 8 |
| Disliked Workshop Presentation | 3 | 2 | 2 | - | - | - | 1 | 8 |
| Survey Questions Not Specific to Agency Needs | - | 1 | 3 | - | 1 | - | 1 | 6 |
| Tabloid Format Not Suitable | - | 1 | 2 | - | 2 | 1 | - | 6 |
| Lack Expertise in Using Community Problem Information | 3 | 3 | - | - | - | - | - | 6 |
| No Prior Involvement in Study | 1 | - | 4 | - | 1 | - | - | 6 |
| Respondents Not Answering: | (1) | (5) | - | (3) | (3) | (2) | - | (14) |

Total: Number of Instances of Negative Cites = 77+

Total: Number of Respondents Citing Negative Factors = 46

*Respondents were permitted multiple answers.

+Those negative comments cited less than 6 times were omitted.

or a breakdown in the communication of the researchers is unknown at this time.

Legislative staff persons, who reported having problems with the fit between the I:TT study findings and their job related informational needs, also reported that the findings were too general and the study poorly timed. The following are quotes from respondents:

> Certain points were off target and missed the gutsy part of the problems in terms of the children and youth. There was no substantial information that would help give guidance in any direction.
>
> I:TT established business leaving downtown as a fact. I told them about this.... It made me wonder where the questions came from.
>
> The [study] information was not specific and could not be used in a direct manner.

Summary

A comparison of the response rates between Tables 4 and 5 suggests a more general enthusiasm for the positive aspects over the negative aspects of the I:TT study. The impact study indicates that use of the I:TT study findings was made by respondents citing negative influence as well as positive influence factors. This suggests that other factors may have been more important in influencing utilization. Two factors that will be examined are initial involvement and explanation on the use of study findings.

## UTILIZATION

Initial Involvement

As previously mentioned, the I:TT research team attempted to involve potential users of the study in questionnaire development in hopes that their identification of issue areas would lead them to use the information gathered on those issues. Each respondent was categorized as either "initially involved" or "non-involved" in the development of the study, depending upon whether or not they had participated in questionnaire development.

Twenty-four respondents were initially involved through participation in generating questions and reviewing drafts of the questionnaire. The remaining thirty-six respondents were not initially involved but had requested materials on the findings. The comparison among categories is shown in Table 6, below.

TABLE 6

RESPONDENT'S INVOLVEMENT IN THE PLANNING OF THE I:TT STUDY

| | Initially Involved | | Totals |
|---|---|---|---|
| Position | Yes | No | |
| Coop Ext Admin | 2 | 4 | 6 |
| Coop Ext Advis | 6 | 9 | 15 |
| State Office Super | 10 | 2 | 12 |
| State Office Ass't | - | 7 | 7 |
| Legislator | - | 9 | 9 |
| Legis Staff | 5 | 2 | 7 |
| Special Interest Group | 1 | 3 | 4 |
| Totals: | 24 | 36 | 60 |

Table 6 indicates that state office supervisors and legislative staff persons were more heavily involved than were Cooperative Extension personnel. Legislators and state office assistants were not contacted during the initial planning stages.

Table 7 (page 17) and Table 8 (page 18) show the level of instrumental and conceptual utilization among those initially and not initially involved. As indicated in Table 7, equal numbers of both categories conducted programs while a slightly higher number of those initially involved used the data for report writing. Only those initially involved used the I:TT findings to change legislation.

TABLE 7

INSTRUMENTAL UTILIZATION OF I:TT FINDINGS BY *RESPONDENTS BOTH INITIALLY INVOLVED AND NOT INVOLVED IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE I:TT STUDY

| Types of Instrumental Utilization | Respondents Involved (N=24) | Respondents Not Involved (N=36) | Total (60) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Program Development | 5 | 5 | 10 |
| Preparation of Agency Reports | 4 | 6 | 10 |
| Increase Resources | 3 | 2 | 5 |
| Change Law | 3 | - | 3 |
| Teaching Tool | 2 | 1 | 3 |
| Create News Reports | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| Identify Resources | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| Obtain Funding | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| Use I:TT Data In Place of Own Study | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| Total: | 14 | 14 | +40 |

Totals: Respondents involved and not utilizing instrumentally = 10

Respondents not involved and not utilizing instrumentally = 24

*Respondents were permitted multiple answers.

+Instances of instrumental utilization.

As indicated in Table 8, those not initially involved made greater conceptual usage of the I:TT findings for dissemination, presentation, discussion and as a tool to gain entrance into organizations and activities outside their offices.

TABLE 8

CONCEPTUAL UTILIZATION OF I:TT FINDINGS BY *RESPONDENTS BOTH INITIALLY INVOLVED AND NOT INVOLVED IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE I:TT STUDY

| Types of Conceptual Utilization | Respondents Involved (N=24) | Respondents Not Involved (N=36) | Total (60) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Dissemination | 6 | 12 | 18 |
| Delivered Presentation | 5 | 9 | 14 |
| In Process of Developing Program | 7 | 6 | 13 |
| To Gain Entrance Into Other Organizations | 1 | 7 | 8 |
| Discussion | 2 | 5 | 7 |
| Reference | 2 | 2 | 4 |
| Total | 15 | 24 | +64 |

Totals: Respondents involved not utilizing conceptually = 9

Respondents not involved and not utilizing conceptually = 12

*Respondents were permitted multiple answers

+Instances of conceptual utilization

Thus, utilization occurred among both groups with higher instances of conceptual utilization among those not initially involved. Equal numbers of both groups engaged in instrumental utilization.

Utilization, then, seems to be less dependent upon initial involvement than upon other factors. One such factor is position. The I:TT staff identified within state agencies those persons involved in future planning for a particular agency. Also identified were those persons on the legislative staffs who were interested in issues the legislators may face in the near future as legislative staffs must continually provide legislators with data on specific issues. Thus, the I:TT researchers identified by position those persons who were most likely to benefit from the study findings and included these same people in the initial planning stages of the I:TT study.

For purposes of studying impact, an assumption was made that those who were initially involved in the I:TT study would tend to make greater usage of the findings than those not initially involved, particularly if the respondents were concerned with planning and future needs of their organizations. This assumption appears not to have held.

Although five out of seven legislative staff persons interviewed were initially involved (Table 6, page 16), their utilization as a group was not as high as assumed (Table 1, page 8 and Table 2, page 9). On the other hand, Cooperative Extension personnel used the findings even though well under half of these respondents were initially involved. A majority of state office supervisors were initially involved. Yet, their utilization level does not represent their level of involvement. (This may indicate that the question is not "if" someone were initially involved, but "how" and "to what extent" someone was initially involved.) Legislators are the only group to support the assumption that with no initial involvement comes low utilization. Thus, it appears that factors other than or in addition to initial involvement are associated with utilization of the I:TT study findings.

## RECEIPT BY RESPONDENTS OF AN EXPLANATION ON HOW TO USE THE STUDY FINDINGS

Respondents were asked:

> Once the study was completed, were you told by the I:TT staff how the study results might be used?

None of the state office assistants, legislators, or legislative staff persons reported attending such a presentation, although two general workshop sessions were given in Springfield, Illinois, the state capitol, and private workshops were given to major state agencies. Almost all Cooperative Extension personnel received an explanation as a series of ten workshops were conducted around the state with attendance required of all county level Extension personnel.

TABLE 9

COMPARISON BETWEEN POSITION CATEGORY AND EXPLANATION OF I:TT FINDINGS

| | Received Explanation | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Position | Yes | No | Don't Recall | No Answer | Total |
| Coop Ext Admin | 5 | 1 | - | - | 6 |
| Coop Ext Advis | 13 | 1 | 1 | - | 15 |
| State Office Super | 3 | 8 | 1 | - | 12 |
| State Office Ass't | - | 6 | 1 | - | 8 |
| Legislator | - | 5 | - | 4 | 9 |
| Legis Staff | - | 4 | 2 | 1 | 7 |
| Special Interest Group | 2 | 2 | - | - | 4 |
| Total: | 23 | 27 | 5 | 5 | 60 |

Of the 23 persons who had received an explanation of how the findings might be used, 21 respondents utilized the findings either instrumentally or conceptually. Of the 27 respondents who did not receive an explanation, 17 utilized the findings while

10 did not. Five respondents did not recall if they had received an explanation on the use of the findings. It appears that receipt of an explanation on the use of the study findings was a very important variable, as only two of the 23 respondents receiving an explanation did not use the findings. Also, over one-third of the 27 respondents who did not receive an explanation did not use the findings instrumentally or conceptually. (See Table 10, page 22).

In addition, out of seven legislators, none of whom received an explanation, only two used the findings. However, upon examination of the other two groups not receiving an explanation (state office assistants and legislative staff persons), we find almost an even split between those who utilized the findings and those who did not: out of 7 state office assistants, 4 used the findings: out of 7 legislative staff persons, 3 used the findings. (See Table 11, page 22). This finding casts some doubt over the strength of the variable "receipt by respondents of an explanation on the use of the study findings". One question that ought to be raised is: "In what instances were respondents given an explanation of the findings but not told how the findings may be used?" While evidence in the data is sketchy, it appears that some respondents were not always clear about whether they were told how the findings might be used. The following are respondent quotes:

> ...if we had a presentation geared specifically in our agency, we might have been able to hone in on what we needed without more analysis.
>
> I don't remember getting a briefing on how to use the study.
>
> ...it would have taken a conference ... to pound home the usefulness of the survey.

Yet, Table 10 suggests that whatever explanation was given, it, in part, may have stimulated respondents to use the study findings.

Summary

Two factors -- initial involvement and receipt of an explanation -- were assumed to affect utilization. Impact study data indicate that initial involvement by itself

TABLE 10

COMPARISON BETWEEN USE LEVEL OF FINDINGS AND EXPLANATION OF THE I:TT FINDINGS

| Level of Use of Study Findings | Reveived Explanation: Yes | No | Don't Recall | No Answer | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Used (N=40) | 21 | 17 | 2 | - | 40 |
| Did Not Use (N=20) | 2 | 10 | 3 | 5 | 20 |
| Total: | 23 | 27 | 5 | 5 | 60 |

TABLE 11

USE LEVEL OF I:TT STUDY FINDING COMPARED TO RESPONDENT POSITION

| Respondent Position | Use Level: Used | Not Used | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| Coop Ext Admin | 6 | - | 6 |
| Coop Ext Advis | 15 | - | 15 |
| State Office Super | 7 | 5 | 12 |
| State Office Ass't | 4 | 3 | 7 |
| Legislator | 2 | 7 | 9 |
| Legis Staff | 3 | 4 | 4 |
| Special Interest Group | 3 | 1 | 4 |
| Total: | 40 | 20 | 60 |

was not a predominant factor leading to utilization. However, when in combination with position of respondent, this variable becomes more important. Further study on the degree and quality of initial involvement would provide a clearer assessment of this variable.

Receipt of an explanation was less equivocal in that utilization was dramatically higher among those receiving an explanation. Here, too, position of respondent and quality of the explanation may affect the strength of this variable.

## ADDITIONAL FACTORS

Why utilization occurs has been examined in light of positive influences, negative influences, and additional variables such as prior involvement, position, and receipt of an explanation on the use of study findings. While assessing these, three additional factors surfaced to help explain the varied patterns of utilization. These are:

1) Cooperative Extension as an organization that plans and presents educational programs responding to community needs can easily facilitate utilization of research information;

2) Public decision-makers and planners need public opinion information of a wide spectrum that is collected through scientific methodology; and

3) The Illinois: Today and Tomorrow study represented a source of input on local and state perceptions that is not normally available to decision-makers.

### Cooperative Extention

That all respondents from this organization utilized the findings comes as no surprise. The focus of the Cooperative Extension service is to provide educational programming on the county level. Working with leaders in the counties, county agents receive research information from the University of Illinois and disseminate the information through educational programs. Thus, the Cooperative Extension service, through its county agents, has the ability to both disseminate information

and facilitate the utilization of that information.

It must also be added that county agents are more accustomed to developing programs on agricultural research where application is very specific. The agents were not comfortable with public opinion survey research which does not necessarily lend itself to clear-cut application. This problem may have interfered with more active utilization by some county agents. Still, instances of usage among Cooperative Extension personnel were very high.

Public Decision-Makers and Planners

The I:TT study findings which contained public perception of issues and problems facing Illinois communities provided the public decision-maker and planner with needed information upon which to base decisions. Respondents interviewed in the impact study often stated the need for survey information that has been scientifically collected.

> It's the only public opinion data I've seen that was conducted in a scientifically valid way. The sample was big enough and appropriate.
>
> I'm always looking for an unbiased opinion survey. I really feel more confident in this [I:TT] survey than in some poll surveys like Time Magazine.

In addition, many of the issues articulated in the I:TT study will continue to demand attention. The I:TT study information is relevant for future planning as well as for current concerns (environmental issues, consumer problems, nuclear power, etc.). Having these issues spelled out and prioritized allowed decision-makers and planners to assess their perceptions against those of the general public.

Most important, the scope of the I:TT study was far greater than any study that could have been conducted by a single legislator or state official. Thus, the needs of decision-makers and planners and the availability of a credible study provided the fit that led to widespread utilization of the study findings.

Illinois:Today and Tomorrow Study

The I:TT study had a major advantage: it was the only study of its kind done in Illinois. While timing may not have been good for specific organizations, the vast majority of the questions were designed to elicit information that could be used by many in the intended audience. For many respondents, timing was good and continues to be, as the scope of the I:TT study includes problems and issues requiring continued attention. That the study was seen as objective and having credence was important in its utilization. Thus, it was perceived as credible and it was the only study that contained comprehensive Illinois-specific information. Essentially, it was the best and the only game in town.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

To insure better utilization, researchers might want to consider the following:

> The survey should be conceptualized as a continuum of research-dissemination-utilization.

Research

Potential users of research information need to be asked what format is best for them to receive research findings. The desired format will vary among agencies and organizations and may require some sort of compromise for the researcher. Methods of dissemination ought to be chosen that will allow for varied audiences to become familiar with the research findings. A multi-faceted approach may include media coverage, personal contacts, presentations, written information, research publications, and meetings to discuss the findings.

Intended lay and professional audiences will not automatically know how to utilize research findings. This was evident in the negative influence factor "not told how to use findings". During the research planning stage, the researcher does well to begin exploring how the findings might be used. Once the findings are

disseminated, presentations that demonstrate utilization for specific audiences should be developed. Sometimes a two-day workshop is appropriate while only an afternoon session may be adequate for persons familiar with social science research. Adult needs and learning styles differ and presentations ought to account for this.

Explanations of how research findings may be used is only a first step. Follow-up activities ought to include working with a target group. Sharing documentation on how others used research information may stimulate some to explore different forms of utilization. Found in the impact study were respondents who felt they needed to hear a presentation on how to use the I:TT study findings more than once. This makes follow-up crucial.

It is naturally hoped that research will be expanded to include dissemination and utilization as part of its process. This expansion may create a rerouting of applied research from its entry as an obscure journal article to the working place where it can affect those for whom it was intended.

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